



Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12



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Fall Prevention in the Home

Falling is the number one cause of injury-related deaths for people age 65 and older. In the United States, one out of three older people fall each year. About 2 million older people are treated in emergency rooms. Five hundred thousand people are admitted to the hospital and 15,000 die from fall-related injuries.

Don't let this happen to you!

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What Can You Do?

1. Follow Winter Safety Precautions.

- Check the weather before you go out. Freezing temperatures and frost can cause slippery spots.
- Wear non-slip shoes or boots when you go out. Be sure your shoes fit well.
- Always use your cane, walker, or wheelchair.
- Walk slowly.
- Avoid mud, ice, snow, or water when walking outside.
- Use salt or sand on your walkways. Be sure the walkways and driveway are well lit.
- Hold on to railings when using the bus or other forms of transportation.

2. Start a Regular Exercise Program.

- The secret is to find a program that you enjoy and make it part of your daily routine.
- Do exercises that improve both balance and coordination like Tai Chi.
- Talk to your primary care provider about the VA's MOVE Program. MOVE has an exercise DVD called "Get Fit for Life."



- Ask your healthcare provider to suggest some exercises to improve your strength and balance.
- Begin a swimming, walking, or exercise workout program. Senior centers, your local VA, fitness clubs, and YMCA's have good exercise programs.

3. Get Your Vision Checked.

- Many falls happen because people miss a step or trip over something they didn't see.
- Each year have your vision checked for cataracts and glaucoma.
- If you wear glasses, have your prescription checked each year.

4. Go over all your medicine with your healthcare provider or pharmacist.

- Bring a list of all your over-the-counter and prescription medicine to your provider.
- Tell your provider if you have dizziness, sleepiness or light-headedness. This may be caused by your medicine.
- Your pharmacist may suggest the best time to take your medicine or changes in medicine that will lower your risk of falling.

- Your provider may ask you to check your blood pressure or blood sugar at home. Bring the readings to your next appointment, in case your medicine needs to be adjusted. You can also use the forms on the My HealtheVet webpage (www.myhealth.va.gov) and print a record to bring to your next appointment.

5. Make your home safer.

Follow these simple tips or ask your provider for a physical therapy safety evaluation of your home.

Kitchen

Arrange things you use most often on the easy-to-reach shelves. Do not use chairs to reach upper shelves. Use a step stool with a bar to hold on to. Be sure your pet's dishes are not in your walkway.

Bathrooms

Use a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the tub or shower floor. Install grab bars near the toilet and in the tub.

Bedrooms

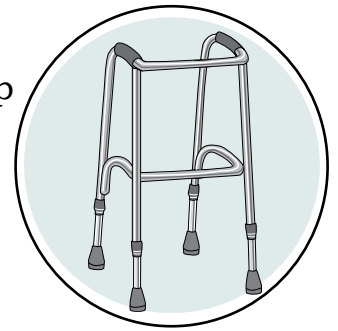
Use night-lights along the way to the bathroom. Have lamps close to your bed, within easy reach.

Floors

Remove throw rugs, use non-slip backing, or double stick tape so rugs lay flat.

Move the furniture making a clear pathway.

Make sure there are no objects (books, papers, and shoes), wires or cords to trip over. Wear shoes instead of going barefoot or wearing slippers. Always use your walker, cane, or wheelchair, if you have them.

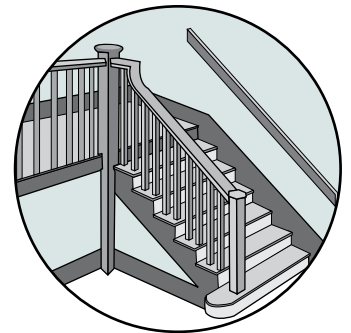


Steps/stairs

Fix any broken steps or railings.

Make sure the area is well lit, with light switches at the top and bottom of the steps.

Carpet should be attached to the steps, with no torn or loose sections. If you are carrying something when using the stairs, be sure your vision is not blocked.



References:

NCIP. A toolkit to prevent senior falls. Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

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Alert! Slips and falls hurt us all. Hazards at Work Series. WSIB/CSPAAT, Ontario. Jan. 2004.

Slip and fall prevention. Transportation Health and Safety Association of Ontario. Toronto, Ontario.

Cold Weather Slip and Fall Prevention. Risk Control Bulletin. Ecclesiastical Insurance. Gloucester, England. Sept. 10, 2006.

Submitted by:

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Women and Smoking

Did you know that certain brands of cigarettes are designed to appeal to a woman's desire to be attractive, cool, or sophisticated? The tobacco industry has been very successful in its efforts to increase smoking in women. The most recent CDC survey (2006) showed that about 1 in 5 American women, age 18 and older, smoke cigarettes.

Cancer and Smoking

We have all heard about the link between smoking and lung cancer. However, did you know that smoking is also a major cause of cancer of the throat and bladder? Women who smoke have an increased risk for cancer of the pancreas and kidney. Smoking is also a major cause of heart disease for women and increases the risk of stroke.

Menstruation and Smoking

Women who smoke may have more painful or irregular periods. Menopause occurs earlier for women smokers. In addition, smokers may have more severe symptoms during menopause. Postmenopausal women who smoke have lower bone density than women who never smoked.

Conception, Pregnancy and Smoking

Women who smoke may have problems conceiving. Once pregnant, you may be at higher risk for complications. These include ectopic pregnancy, spontaneous abortion, and major bleeding during delivery. There may also be an increased risk for premature delivery.

Smoking also affects your unborn baby. Your newborn is more likely to have a low birth weight. The risk of stillbirth, neonatal death, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is higher for the babies of women who smoke during pregnancy.

Secondhand Smoke and Children

Almost 3 million preschoolers breathe secondhand smoke at home at least 4 days a week. Older children, whose parents smoke, get sick more often. Smoking can also trigger a child's asthma attack. Children who live with parents who smoke get more ear infections and may need surgery for ear tubes.

The good news!

It is never too late to stop. Even though it's best to quit when you are young, there are still benefits to quitting at any age.

Many women are afraid to quit for fear of gaining weight. Some do add a few pounds in the first year. This can usually be controlled through diet and exercise. The health benefits of quitting are much greater than any problems posed by a small weight gain.

Tips to help you quit:

- Tell your family and friends you've quit smoking. Ask for help if you need it.
- Think of yourself as a non-smoker. Hang up "No Smoking" signs. Try to avoid people who smoke and smoke-filled places like bars. Don't relive your days as a smoker.
- Plan to spend the money you save on cigarettes on another kind of pleasure, like shopping.

Your VA facility offers programs to help you quit. Ask your Primary Care Provider for information.

References:

Campaign for Smoke Free Kids www.tobaccofreekids.org
American Cancer Society www.cancer.org

Submitted by:

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One woman's story ...

It was the spring of 1994 and, after almost 10 years, I finally decided that it was time to quit. It helped that my fiancé at the time was supportive and was asking me to quit for my health. I was working at the VA and heard about the Smoking Cessation Program. It was easy to sign up and I just had to attend one class per week.

The "patch" was offered at that time. The program staff were very supportive and friendly. They were there for you if you felt like giving up. The first two weeks were extremely difficult. After that, it slowly got easier, food tasted better, clothes and house didn't smell like smoke anymore.

I am so thankful that the VA offered this program and I was able to quit such a bad habit. I would, and still do, recommend this program to veterans and employees.

Tracy
Primary Care RN



Why Should I be Vaccinated?

Vaccinations work to keep you healthy. They also may keep you from spreading infections to other people. Being vaccinated can help you prevent illness for yourself, your loved ones and people you come in contact with everyday.

What vaccinations do I need?

Flu Vaccine

The flu vaccine protects against the influenza virus. If you get the flu, you will have symptoms similar to a cold, but more severe. The flu can be life threatening. This vaccine does not protect you against the illness many people call “stomach flu”, which involves nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

You CANNOT get the flu from the vaccine because the shot contains only the dead virus. If you do get sick around the time you were vaccinated, you probably have something else, like a cold.

Most people should get a flu shot EVERY year. The flu virus mutates quickly, so the vaccine changes every year. It is best to get the flu shot as soon as it is offered, usually in early October. However, you can still get a flu shot as *late as March*.



Answered by:

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Pneumococcal Vaccine

The pneumococcal vaccine protects you from the virus that causes pneumonia. Pneumonia is a respiratory disease that can be life threatening. Everyone age 65 or older should be vaccinated. If you are 65 or older, you will only need to get one shot in your lifetime.

If you are younger than 65, but have alcoholism, heart or lung disease, kidney failure, diabetes, HIV infection, or certain types of cancer, you should also be vaccinated. You will need a “booster” shot of the pneumococcal vaccine once you turn 65.

Shingles (Herpes Zoster)

Shingles is a painful disease caused by Varicella zoster (same virus that causes chickenpox). It often shows up later in life as a painful rash or blisters affecting one side of the body. After the original rash is gone, painful flare-ups can occur for the rest of your life. You may also have severe nerve pain in the same area.

The shingles vaccine is given to people 60 years and older and only one dose is needed. It should not be given to someone with a weakened immune system.

Td (Tetanus and Diphtheria) or Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis)

These vaccines protect you from several different kinds of diseases caused by bacteria. Tetanus often enters the body through cuts and wounds and causes a stiff neck, jaw and other problems. Diphtheria causes a severe sore throat that can lead to other health problems or even death. Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, causes severe coughing spells. All of these diseases can be life threatening.

Everyone should be vaccinated against Tetanus and Diphtheria (Td) every 10 years. The Pertussis vaccine only requires one adult booster shot.

Human Papillomavirus Vaccine (HPV)

The HPV vaccine is for females 11 through 26 years of age. It can prevent some strains of a common sexually transmitted disease called Genital Human Papillomavirus. Although some types of HPV infections can go away on their own, others cause warts or cervical cancer. Getting the HPV vaccine can help prevent MOST types of genital warts and MOST types of cervical cancer.

**If you are not sure which vaccine
you need, talk to your Primary Care provider.**

For more information:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/vaccines

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Important note: We are not able to mail this newsletter to you. It can be found in waiting rooms of your VA Medical Center and outpatient clinics.

You can also subscribe to the electronic version of this newsletter by going to www.visn12.med.va.gov/subscribe.htm



Your best source for information about your health will always be your health care team. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to ask questions about your health concerns.

Phone Numbers for VISN 12 Hospitals

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Iron Mountain:	906-774-3300
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or Idea for Future Articles**

Do you have an "Ask An Expert" question or an idea for a future article? Your ideas can be e-mailed or mailed to the Senior Editor.

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